

MENDOTA APARTMENTS  
2220 20th Street, NW  
Washington  
District of Columbia

HABS DC-873  
*HABS DC-873*

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### MENDOTA APARTMENTS

HABS No. DC-873

Location: 2220 20<sup>th</sup> Street, N.W., Washington, D.C.

The Mendota Apartments building is located at latitude: 38.919007, longitude: -77.046226. The coordinate represents the structure's northeast corner. This coordinate was obtained on September 2, 2011, using Google Earth. The building has no restriction on its release to the public.

Present Use: Residential

Significance: The Mendota Apartments is significant as an example of the boom in luxury apartment house construction that took place in the first half of the twentieth century in Washington, D.C., to accommodate a growing need for housing.

Historian: Justine Christianson, HAER Historian, prepared the historical information and building description sections of this report while J. Lawrence Lee, HAER Engineer-Historian, wrote the description of the elevators and heating system.

Project Information: This recording project focused on the building's two historic elevators, one of which was extensively rebuilt in 2010-2011. Jet Lowe, HAER Photographer, produced the large-format photographs in summer 2010. Special thanks to James C. Wood for assistance and for providing copies of the original drawings of the building.

## PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

### A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1901

2. Architect: James G. Hill (1841-1913)

James G. Hill was a significant architect in Washington, D.C., at the turn of the twentieth century. Born in Malden, Massachusetts, Hill worked at the Boston architectural firm of Gridley J. F. Bryant and Arthur Gilman before moving to Washington, D.C., in 1862. He was a clerk in the federal government until he moved to New York in 1865. Hill returned to Washington a few years later and worked as a draftsman with the U.S. Treasury from

1868 to 1874 before becoming an architect in 1875.<sup>1</sup> From 1876-1883, he held the position of Supervising Architect of the Treasury under Secretary of the Treasury John Sherman. During his tenure as Supervising Architect, Hill oversaw the design of the Old Bureau of Engraving and Printing in Washington in 1879, along with post offices, courthouses, and other federal buildings across the country.<sup>2</sup>

After his resignation from the Treasury on September 18, 1883, following an investigation into his office's practices, Hill established his own successful Washington-based firm. Commercial buildings designed by Hill included the National Bank of Washington (1888) and the Washington Loan and Trust Branch of Riggs National Bank (1891).<sup>3</sup> The local press lauded the Washington Loan and Trust Branch as a "credit to the city" and declared that the "magnificent granite structure" was indicative of Washington's rising status as a city.<sup>4</sup> Other notable buildings designed by Hill include the 1899 U.S. Government Printing Office and the Willard Building, an eight-story light stone, brick, and terra cotta office building dating to 1902.<sup>5</sup> In addition to his work on federal and commercial buildings, Hill also designed residences, including "a handsome and costly" one at the southwest corner of Connecticut Avenue and Bancroft Place. The 1897 design for a four-story brownstone and red brick house with an English basement was notable for the bicycle room on the ground floor.<sup>6</sup>

Demand for apartment houses grew in the first part of the twentieth century, and Hill designed a number of others after the 1901 Mendota.<sup>7</sup> In 1902, Hill completed Stoneleigh Court for Secretary of State John Hay. According to *The Washington Post*, Hill's plans were for what would "be one of the handsomest apartment houses in the Capital city." The eight-story, brown stone, brick, and terra cotta building was reportedly planned with twelve apartments on each floor, aside from the first, which would contain an office, café, and "an immense Oriental reception-room."<sup>8</sup> The Ontario, which opened

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<sup>1</sup> Hill was also listed as a clerk for the Supervising Architect in 1866; see "Architects Database," D.C. Historic Preservation Office, CD Rom, 2008 version.

<sup>2</sup> Antoinette J. Lee, *Architects to the Nation: The Rise and Decline of the Supervising Architect's Office* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 124-135. Hill's tenure with the U.S. Treasury was tainted by an indictment and other accusations. Lee notes, "that he survived in his position for as long as he did—seven years—and that he entered into a successful private practice following his departure from the government, is testimony to both the depth of his political support and that of his comrades in the AIA [American Institute of Architects]," p. 129. See also "Architect Database"; "Architect J.G. Hill Dead," *The Washington Post*, December 20, 1913, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> National Bank is located at 7<sup>th</sup> Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., while the Washington Loan and Trust Branch is at 9<sup>th</sup> and F streets, N.W.

<sup>4</sup> "A Fine Pile of Granite," *The Washington Post*, May 17, 1891, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> The Government Printing Office is on North Capitol Street, N.E., while the Willard Building is between Pennsylvania Avenue and F Street, N.W., on 14<sup>th</sup> Street. See "Real Estate Market," *The Washington Post*, May 25, 1902, p. 26.

<sup>6</sup> "Real Estate Market," *The Washington Post*, January 10, 1897, p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> Architectural historian James Goode differentiates between apartment *buildings* and apartment *houses*, noting the latter were furnished with lobbies, elevators, and staff. That distinction is being made in this report as well. See James Goode, *Best Addresses: A Century of Washington's Distinguished Apartment House* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988), p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> "Mr. Hay's Apartment House," *The Washington Post*, June 18, 1902, p. 7. Stoneleigh Court was located on Connecticut Avenue and L Street, N.W., but is no longer standing.

between 1903 and 1906, was another luxury apartment house designed by Hill at the request of real estate developer Archibald McLachlan of McLachlan National Bank. It had the distinction of being the first apartment house in the city meant to be seen on all four sides.<sup>9</sup>

Hill partnered with Frederick A. Kendall from 1904-11, forming Hill & Kendall. In addition to his architecture practice, Hill served on city commissions, such as one tasked with revising the city's building regulations to accommodate modern building techniques. He was also active in the American Institute of Architects and was elected a fellow in 1888.<sup>10</sup>

3. Original and subsequent owners, occupants, uses: The Iowa Apartment House Company financed the construction of the Mendota Apartments. The building was intended from the first to be an apartment house, and it has sustained that use since its construction.<sup>11</sup> In 1952, the Mendota's ownership transferred to a cooperative, which was common throughout Washington, D.C., in the mid-twentieth century. In cooperative apartments, a corporation made up of shareholders (the residents) manages the building rather than an external company.<sup>12</sup>

When first constructed, the Mendota contained two public spaces in addition to the apartments: a drugstore on the first floor facing 20<sup>th</sup> Street and a dining room on the top floor. At an unknown date, those two spaces were transformed for residential use.<sup>13</sup>

For most of the twentieth century, residents of the Mendota Apartments were white and from the upper and middle classes. When it opened in 1901, the building attracted high-level government officials like George W. Norris (who represented Ohio in the House of Representatives from 1903-1913 and the Senate from 1913-1943) and Jeannette Rankin (who represented Montana in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1917-1919 and 1941-1943 and was the first woman to serve in Congress).<sup>14</sup> From the 1920s through the mid-twentieth century, local newspapers like *The Washington Post* reveal that residents continued to be white, middle class, and often civil servants. These included Brig. Gen. George W. Burr, who served as Assistant Chief of Ordnance in the U.S. Army while residing in the Mendota. Burr had a long military career managing arsenals in the United States (such as the Rock Island Arsenal in Illinois) and also supplying troops overseas during World War I.<sup>15</sup> Jane Boyd Silvester, a nurse who established a nursing home in

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<sup>9</sup> Goode, pp. 59-63. It contains 120 apartments and still stands on Ontario Road, N.W.

<sup>10</sup> "To Study European Cities," *The Washington Post*, August 22, 1895, p. 10; "Architects Will Meet Here," *The Washington Post*, November 17, 1899, p. 1; Lee, p. 135.

<sup>11</sup> Little information has been found about the Iowa Apartment House Company, except that it financed the construction of other apartments in Washington, D.C., including the Albemarle Apartment House at 17<sup>th</sup> and T streets and the Sherman at 15<sup>th</sup> and L streets around the same time. See "Real Estate Market," *The Washington Post*, October 13, 1901, p. 12.

<sup>12</sup> Goode, p. 174.

<sup>13</sup> Goode, p. 43.

<sup>14</sup> Goode, p. 46.

<sup>15</sup> "Gen. Burr Suddenly Dies at Home Here," *The Washington Post*, March 5, 1923, p. 3.

the District in 1903, and Jannet L. Ditto, a noted history teacher for thirty-nine years at Central High School, typify the apartment's residents.<sup>16</sup>

In 1971, the Mendota's residential application process led the D.C. Human Rights Commission to issue its first finding of racial discrimination since its establishment in 1958. An African-American woman sued the Mendota cooperative after her rental application was denied in 1970 by the apartment house's board. The day following the denial of her application, the board accepted one from a white student. The Mendota's board argued that the African-American applicant had been rejected because of prior financial difficulties, but the D.C. Human Rights Commission determined that the board's evaluation of potential residents was arbitrary. The fact that there had never been an African-American resident and that the apartment house's by-laws had not been changed to conform to the city's 1963 anti-discrimination statutes until the complaint had been filed no doubt detracted from the Mendota board's arguments. The cooperative was ordered to pay \$950 in damages to the African-American applicant. The D.C. Human Rights Commission further instructed the board to "cease and desist from discriminating against applicants because of their race, color, religion or national origin" and "report every six months to the D.C. human rights office all changes in occupancy in the apartment building by race."<sup>17</sup>

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: The initial building permit lists J. L. Marshall as the builder. E. R. Diggs & Company supplied the brick.<sup>18</sup>

5. Original plans and construction: The Iowa Apartment House Company acquired a plot of land for the apartment house at the southwest corner of Kalorama Road (then known as Kalorama Avenue) and 20<sup>th</sup> Street, with 110' of frontage on Kalorama Road) and 139' on 20<sup>th</sup> Street. A 20'-wide easement on the south side of the lot was granted to allow for light and ventilation. The U-shaped building had rounded and octagonal bays that required a special permit because those on 20<sup>th</sup> Street and Kalorama Road projected beyond the building line.<sup>19</sup>

The April 1, 1901, building permit indicates the seven-story, fireproof structure was expected to cost \$100,000. The original drawings reveal that the building was constructed generally as planned and that few alterations have been made since its erection. In keeping with its status as a luxury apartment house, Hill designed the façades, particularly those fronting 20<sup>th</sup> Street and Kalorama Road since they could be

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<sup>16</sup> "Jane Silvester, Noted Nurse, Dies," *The Washington Post*, April 14, 1936, p. X28; "Jannet L. Ditto, Veteran D.C. Teacher, Dies," *The Washington Post*, August 9, 1942, p. 12.

<sup>17</sup> Quotes from "Apartments Fined; Denied Negro Lease," *The Washington Post*, November 18, 1972, pp. B1-B2; see also Joseph D. Whitaker, "Rejected as Tenant, Woman Asks Damages," *The Washington Post*, p. B4.

<sup>18</sup> Building Permit 1367, Application to Build The Iowa Apt. House, 2118 20<sup>th</sup> Street NW, April 1, 1901, available on microfilm at the Washingtoniana Division, Martin Luther King Jr. Library, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as MLK Library); "E. R. Diggs & Co., Washington, D.C.," *Brick and Clay Record* XVII, no. 6 (December 1902): p. 229. Marshall is listed in the City Directory as a contractor, but no other information has been found about him. See *Boyd's Directory of the District of Columbia* (1898), available at Washingtoniana Division, MLK Library.

<sup>19</sup> "\$30,000 for the 'Widow's Mite'," *The Washington Post*, February 19, 1901, p. 12.

seen from the street, with decorative terra cotta details. The building boasted a molded cornice above the second floor and another under the seventh floor with a denticulated cornice at the roofline. There were also decorative terra cotta panels on the seventh floor between the windows. Numerous windows, the majority of which had openings measuring 6'-8" tall with widths ranging from 2'-10" to 3'-11", provided ample light to the apartments. There were also smaller windows measuring 5'-3" tall x 2'-1" wide. Each window was topped with a decorative terra cotta key.

Hill's plan for the principle entrance, located on 20<sup>th</sup> Street, was for wood double doors under a limestone balcony supported by carved scrolls. This opened to a vestibule and lobby, with a staircase and passenger and service elevators to access the upper floors. A secondary doorway was located at the south end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Street façade for the drugstore.

The original floor plans reveal a variety of apartment layouts and sizes, ranging from efficiencies to seven-room units. The larger, three- and four-bedroom apartments were located at the west end of the building in the wings while the efficiencies and smaller apartments were on the east end. The apartments contained chambers (bedrooms), parlors, kitchens with gas stoves and sinks, dining rooms, and bathrooms, as well as closets. The larger units had separate pantries located off the kitchen. Each unit had steam heat.

The basement held storage compartments at the south end. The drug store's "cellar" (accessed by a separate stairway from the drug store), along with the apartment's meter room, boiler room, and coal room, were located on the east façade from south to north. The north wing held a dynamo room, bicycle room, garbage room, laundry, and apartment.<sup>20</sup>

6. Alterations and additions: The building has undergone few alterations from its initial construction. The drug store was converted into an apartment and one large unit was split into two.<sup>21</sup> In 2011, the original passenger elevator was replaced with a modern one, although such original features as the decorative grille and controls were retained.

B. Historical Context: The Mendota is located in a neighborhood of Washington, D.C., now known as Kalorama Triangle, which derives its name from a nineteenth-century estate called Kalorama and from the triangular configuration of the area formed by the siting of Connecticut Avenue, Calvert Street, and Columbia Road. This area was originally part of 600-acre tract surveyed in 1664 and known as Widow's Mite.<sup>22</sup> Over the next several hundred years, Widow's

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<sup>20</sup> "East Elevation," "Basement Floor Plan," and "Floor Plan" of The Mendota for the Iowa Apartment House, Jas. G. Hill, Architect, undated. Copies of the drawings are held by James C. Wood and have been included in the field records accompanying this documentation. See also, Building Permit 1367.

<sup>21</sup> Information provided by James C. Wood, email with Justine Christianson, HAER Historian, October 26, 2011.

<sup>22</sup> The name "Widow's Mite" may be derived from St. Mark 12:42 "And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing," according to Michael R. Harrison, "Above the Boundary: The

Mite was further divided into country estates, such as the Kalorama Estate. By the 1880s, real estate agents and developers were looking at the land outside the original boundaries of the city of Washington for suburban development opportunities in an effort to ease population pressures in the city. This area was particularly attractive due to its proximity to Rock Creek valley and slightly higher elevation, which resulted in cooler temperatures than those in the city center. The extension of transportation routes further encouraged development of what would be called Kalorama Triangle, such as the construction of Connecticut Avenue over Rock Creek into Maryland, the erection of the Connecticut Avenue and Calvert Street bridges [see Connecticut Avenue Bridge, HAER No. DC-27, and Calvert Street Bridge, HAER No. DC-23, for additional information], and the establishment of two streetcar lines.<sup>23</sup>

The development of the Kalorama Triangle area met “the aspirations and taste of a financially secure middle-class” who wanted to be able to readily access their downtown jobs while also living in a residential enclave. These residents were primarily employed by the federal government, which was growing in the early twentieth century. While single-family houses may have generally remained the preference, “elegantly packaged” apartment houses were gradually accepted as suitable housing alternatives by Washington’s transitory upper and middle classes. By 1931, Kalorama Triangle had been fully developed with row houses and apartment houses (twenty-five in all by 1927), along with a few single-family houses. Commercial development was centered on Columbia Road.<sup>24</sup>

Seizing the opportunity to build a luxury apartment house in a newly-developing part of the city, the Iowa Apartment House Company purchased a plot of land that had originally been part of Col. George Truesdell’s country estate, Managassett, for \$30,000 in 1901.<sup>25</sup> The Mendota, therefore, dates to the beginning of a boom in apartment construction in the District, fueled by the growth of the federal government and attendant influx of residents in need of housing. A 1901 newspaper article noted the increasing construction of apartment houses, stating “some people have had an impression that entirely too many apartment houses were erected during the summer, but instead there appears to be a scarcity, and it is expected that a number of new ventures will be made in the early spring.”<sup>26</sup> The Mendota’s status as the city’s premier luxury apartment house had waned by the 1920s, however, as new apartment houses were built along Connecticut Avenue and 16<sup>th</sup> Street, N.W.<sup>27</sup>

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Development of Kalorama and Washington Heights, 1872-1900,” *Washington History* 14, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2002): p. 57.

<sup>23</sup> “\$30,000 for the ‘Widow’s Mite’.” For more information on Kalorama and Widow’s Mite, see Mary Mitchell, “Kalorama: Country Estate to Washington Mayfair,” *Records of the Columbian Historical Society of Washington DC (1971-1972)* (Baltimore: Waverly Press, 1973), pp. 164-189; Harrison, “Above the Boundary,” pp. 57-69; Emily Hotaling Eig, “Kalorama: Two Centuries of Beautiful Views,” in Kathryn Schneider Smith, *Washington at Home: An Illustrated History of Neighborhoods in the Nation’s Capital* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), pp. 277-294.

<sup>24</sup> See Emily Hotaling Eig, “Kalorama Triangle Historic District,” National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, listed May 4, 1987, quotes from Section 7, pp. 1 and 10.

<sup>25</sup> Eig, “Kalorama Triangle Historic District,” National Register of Historic Places Registration Form; “\$30,000 for the ‘Widow’s Mite’.”

<sup>26</sup> “Real Estate Market,” *The Washington Post*, October 13, 1901, p. 12.

<sup>27</sup> Goode, pp. 45-46.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Mendota Apartments is representative of Washington, D.C., apartment houses dating to the early twentieth century. As James Goode notes, it reflects a transitional period in Washington apartment house architecture dating from 1897 to 1905 characterized by how it “awkwardly combined new classical features with Victorian features.”<sup>28</sup> The detailed façade, elevator, and location reflect its status as an early luxury apartment house.
2. Condition of fabric: The Mendota Apartments have been well maintained, and the original fabric remains in excellent condition.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The U-shaped Mendota stands seven stories tall and measures 119' x 95'.<sup>29</sup>
2. Walls: The building is constructed of buff brick with limestone and terra cotta details that remain unchanged from the building's initial design and construction. The detailing is restricted to the public facades (north, east, and south) while the west, which faces the courtyard, is undecorated. The 20<sup>th</sup> Street (east) façade has rounded bays at either end extending to the roof while octagonal bays flank the entrance and extend to the sixth floor, topped by decorative iron railings. The Kalorama Road façade (north) has three bays; the two on the east end are rounded while the one at the west end is square. The south façade has two octagonal bays at the west end and a rounded one at the east end.
3. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads: The front entrance is located under a limestone balcony supported by carved scrolls.
4. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: Wood framed double glass doors in an arched opening with a transom marked “The Mendota” in script constitute the front entrance. A doorway on the north elevation provides access to the basement.
  - b. Windows and shutters: The windows vary in size but all are single-light, double-hung sash.

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<sup>28</sup> Goode, p. 43.

<sup>29</sup> Dimensions from “Floor Plan,” The Mendota for The Iowa Apartment House Co., Jas. G. Hill, Architect, undated.



5. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The roof is flat.
- b. Cornice, eaves: The decorative cornice is made up of terra cotta and molded brick.
- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: There are none.

C. Description of Interior:<sup>30</sup>

1. Floor plans: The Mendota now contains fifty apartments ranging in size from efficiencies to seven-room units.<sup>31</sup> The public space of the building includes the front entrance, which opens to a vestibule featuring 6'-high marble wainscoting and a terrazzo floor with a mosaic Greek-key border. A short flight of stairs leads to another set of double doors that open to the lobby with an attendant's desk. The original mailboxes are located in this area, as well as the recently rebuilt passenger elevator. On this floor only, a semi-circular dial over the elevator door uses a cable-actuated pointer to indicate the passenger elevator's location and movement. Finishes in the lobby include the 6'-high marble wainscoting and terrazzo floor. Gas lights originally provided interior illumination throughout the building, but electric lamps replaced them within a decade.

2. Mechanical Equipment:<sup>32</sup>

a. Elevators: One significant feature of early apartment houses like the Mendota was a manually-controlled passenger elevator that serviced all floors. The Mendota also has a smaller, manually-controlled service elevator. In the early twentieth century, many similar elevators commonly operated on direct current (DC), with the electricity supplied by a nearby streetcar line's power system. The Mendota used power from the Metropolitan Railroad, the streetcar line located one block south on Columbia Road. This arrangement lasted until DC Transit, the final successor to the Metropolitan Railroad, converted this line to busses and removed its electric power lines in 1961. At that time, the Mendota's owners changed the electricity provider to Potomac Electric Power Company (PEPCO), which had been furnishing all other electrical power to the building for decades. Since PEPCO furnished only AC power, the owners installed a motor-generator

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<sup>30</sup> Since the focus of this recording project was not on the apartments but on the elevator, the interior description concentrates on that feature.

<sup>31</sup> With the conversion of the former pharmacy and the division of one apartment into two, the Mendota contained forty-nine units until 2000 when the former staff quarters in the basement were converted into an apartment unit. Information provided by James C. Wood, email with Justine Christianson, HAER Historian, October 26, 2011.

<sup>32</sup> This description of mechanical systems is primarily based on an inspection by the HAER recording team during 2010. Except where noted, the passenger elevator description is of the original elevator, which has since been extensively rebuilt.

set (an AC motor driving a DC generator) so they could retain the original elevators with their DC motors. Until the passenger elevator's recent rebuilding, both were unique remnants of the city's early apartment building architecture, and the service elevator remains so.<sup>33</sup>

The building's two traction (wire rope) elevators, manufactured by the A.B. See Elevator Company of New York, share a common shaft near the center of the building, though each has its own guide rails and drive system. Their motors, gearboxes, hoist drums, and relay panels, along with the motor-generator set, are located in the basement. Except for the service elevator's motor, gearbox, and drum, these components occupy a room next to the shaft. The service elevator drive is mounted in a pit at the bottom of the shaft, about 3' below the basement floor level, concealed by double doors and checker plate steel panels in the floor. Idler sheaves in a rooftop penthouse redirect the car, counterweight, and position-indicator cables routed up from the basement back down the shaft to the cars and counterweights.

Each car consists of a riveted structural steel frame, steel sheet wall and ceiling panels, and a double I-beam sill mounted diagonally below the floor that extends outward to engage two guide rails. A lighter beam mounted perpendicularly to it engages a third guide rail to stabilize the car. This beam also supports small sheaves that route a cable to automatically engage the spring-actuated emergency brake, mounted on the main diagonal beam, in the event of a drive failure. Both cars initially featured a single-handle control that an operator used to regulate the car's motion. At each floor station, the operator had to manually align the car's floor to the building's floor. As built, the doors of each car and floor station were manually operated, with the inner door being of metal articulating-lattice construction. The solid outer doors on each floor were locked in the closed position except when a car was adjacent to one of them. Only the service elevator retains this control and door arrangement.

As originally installed, the interior of the rectangular passenger elevator featured a faux wood finish on steel walls adorned with similarly finished metal crown molding that framed a decorative brass ventilation grille. The car had filleted corners; carpeting over a steel floor; flush-mounted, brass control and annunciator panels; a wainscot bar on three sides; and a four-lamp light fixture centered on its ceiling. A small hatch in the floor provided access to the emergency brake mechanism. The car's primary ventilation—through the crown grill and lattice door as the car moved—was supplemented by a small fan in one upper corner at an unknown date.

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<sup>33</sup> Goode, p. 32. Also J. Lawrence Lee conversations with James C. Wood, August 4 and 30, 2011. See field notes for notes of these conversations.

Although the passenger elevator remained in excellent condition, modern fire safety regulations required it to be extensively rebuilt during 2010-11. The existing shaft, guide rails, sheaves, wire-rope routing, emergency brake, location dial, and car structural frame could be retained, but new, fire-rated car walls and solid doors with powered operators were required. The new walls have an oxidized bronze finish. Automatic, push-button controls in a brass panel replaced the manual control, eliminating the need for a human operator, but the brass control panel and handle were reinstalled in the new control panel, albeit inert, for aesthetic reasons. Similarly, the decorative crown ventilation grille was incorporated into the car's new walls. The relay stand in the basement was replaced with a modern, digital controller that powers a variable-frequency AC motor. The Warfield & Sanford Elevator Company of Washington completed this work in February 2011. The original, faux-finished wall panels and the original drive components have been preserved and are stored in the building.<sup>34</sup>

The original service elevator remains in service essentially as built. Being more utilitarian, it is smaller and less elegantly finished than the passenger elevator. Its steel walls are painted light green, and one corner is beveled to provide clearance for the diagonal beam of the passenger elevator when the cars pass. The white-painted tray ceiling with curved vertical panels that join at small decorative moldings features a single-lamp fixture at its center. The decorative, stamped-metal wainscot on all walls has small, oval ventilation openings. The utilitarian control stand is mounted on brackets to one wall, and its annunciator box is mounted higher on an adjacent wall. This elevator has a wood floor covered with vinyl tile.

b. Heating system: In common with other similar buildings of the era, the Mendota has a low-pressure (<5 psi) steam heating system with cast-iron radiators and condensate return. Two coal-fired boilers located in the basement furnished the steam from the building's opening in 1902 until 2009. These fire-tube boilers, manufactured by Zellers & Company of Washington, have cast iron firing faces with doors to access their flues and fireboxes. In an arrangement common for the period, they employ horizontal, cylindrical pressure vessels that are enclosed on three sides with brick. The pressure vessels, including their steam domes, are of riveted construction. They occupy one end of the boiler room, with the remainder serving as the coal bin. During the 1940s, a gas-fired boiler was installed. The original chute for coal delivery still exists.

The gas-fired boiler was replaced with a modern, automatically-controlled, gas-fired boiler in 2009, but the Mendota's owners left the original boilers in place, thereby providing another rarely seen glimpse of the city's early apartment infrastructure. The replacement boiler and associated piping are located in a portion of the former coal bin, and a system of pipes conveys the steam to all of

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<sup>34</sup> J. Lawrence Lee conversations with James C. Wood, August 4 and 30, 2011.

the building's radiators. Maintaining the original design, a manually-operated valve regulates the steam flow into each radiator and, thus, that room's temperature. A second system of pipes allows condensate to flow by gravity from the radiators to the boiler room, where it is again pumped into the boiler. Makeup water is automatically added as needed to replace any losses. Although residents have replaced a few of the original cast-iron radiators with newer models for aesthetic reasons, most of the building's original radiators, as well as its low-pressure steam and condensate piping, remain in service.<sup>35</sup>

#### D. Site:

1. Historic landscape design: The Mendota Apartment sits at the corner of Kalorama Road and 20<sup>th</sup> Street, N.W., and fills the lot.
2. Outbuildings: From September to December 1916, a one-story brick garage was constructed in the public alley by J. L. Marshall.<sup>36</sup> The garage is no longer extant.

### PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

#### A. Primary Sources:

Building Permit 1367, April 1, 1901, and Building Permit 1401, September 13, 1916, both in Washingtoniana Division, Martin Luther King Jr. Library, Washington, D.C.

Drawings. The Mendota for the Iowa Apartment House, Jas. G. Hill, Architect, undated. Copies of the drawings are held by James C. Wood and have been included in the field records accompanying this documentation.

#### Newspaper Articles:

"A Fine Pile of Granite." *The Washington Post*, May 17, 1891, p. 2.

"Architects Are Kept Busy." *The Washington Post*, June 4, 1893, p. 6.

"To Study European Centers." *The Washington Post*, August 22, 1895, p. 10.

"Real Estate Market." *The Washington Post*, January 10, 1897, p. 14.

"Architects Will Meet Here." *The Washington Post*, November 17, 1899, p. 1.

"Real Estate Market." *The Washington Post*, April 15, 1900, p. 14.

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<sup>35</sup> Inspection by the HAER recording team and J. Lawrence Lee conversations with James C. Wood, August 4 and 30, 2011; email correspondence between Justine Christianson and James C. Wood, October 27, 2011.

<sup>36</sup> Building Permit 1401, Permit to Build Brick Garage, September 13, 1916, available on microfilm at Washingtoniana Division, MLK Library.

“\$30,000 for the ‘Widow’s Mite.’” *The Washington Post*, February 19, 1901, p. 12.

“Real Estate Market.” *The Washington Post*, April 7, 1901, p. E2.

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